Developing and Executing a Home-Station Battalion Mission Rehearsal Exercise

By Captain William H. Shoemate II

As the United States Army struggles with the intricate management of the Army Force Generation process, transformation, and the continual feed of forces to support the War on Terrorism, engineer formations have been left off the mission rehearsal exercise (MRE) training cycle. This has become a recurring problem for the engineer force. Engineer commanders have no choice but to solicit brigade combat teams (BCTs) to be inserted into their combat training center (CTC) MRE rotation before a deployment for Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom. This might work, but engineer commanders usually are at the mercy of competing resources, such as money, shortfalls in observer-controller (OC) manpower, and the CTCs' BCT-centric training menu.

This article illustrates the recent successes of a combat effects engineer battalion MRE replication on the island of Oahu, Hawaii. The 130th Engineer Brigade had to develop a home-station MRE for the 65th Engineer Battalion (Combat Effects) because it couldn't schedule a timely CTC rotation to meet the battalion's deployment training requirements. Besides training and validating the 65th, the biggest deliverable for this MRE was the proof that an Operation Iraqi Freedom training venue can be developed outside the CTC platform. However, it requires tremendous external support, ingenuity, and teamwork.

If the Army invested efforts into designing, equipping, and manning an exportable training capability for modular forces outside the BCT formation, commanders would have the value-added opportunities to insert combat enablers to CTC rotations and/or dedicated home-station MRE resources. Of course, the next problem would be creating a capability that can meet throughput requirements. By designing an exportable training capability, the Army would get the needed insurance that all forces are receiving the same level of training before an Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom rotation. The question remains, "Who within the United States Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) executes this exportable training capability—the CTCs or the United States Army Maneuver Support Center (MANSCEN) at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri?"

For the 130th Engineer Brigade, a synergistic team effort from the brigade staff; the United States Army Garrison, Hawaii, at Schofield Barracks; the Joint Center of Excellence (JCOE) for Improvised Explosive Device (IED) Defeat, Fort Irwin, California; and the Counter-IED (C-IED) Mobile Assistance Training Team (CMATT) No. 1, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, proved that a joint-level MRE-type platform can be designed and linked to meet today's modular engineer force training requirements. Garrisons already have the virtual means via the CTCs; the Directorate of Plans, Training, and Mobilization can provide a forward operating base footprint; and the Training and Audiovisual Support Center would have to stock essential Operation Iraqi Freedom-centric training resources. The JCOE and CMATT already have the manpower and funding. However, several questions arise:

- *Is contract training the intermediate or long-term fix?*
- *How do contractors sustain relevancy without deployment to the area of operations?*
- *Is the CTC or MANSCEN the link that fuses the JCOE, CMATT, and the garrisons to design and deliver this exportable training capability?*

It would not be feasible or cost-effective to replicate the entire CTC training scenario for a home-station MRE, but engineer commanders can tailor CTC training menus to meet essential training shortfalls within a home-station-driven MRE scenario. As the operational tempo continues to escalate for engineers, and dirt CTCs continue to be a scarce resource for engineer formations, an exportable training capability that encompasses TRADOC (CTC and MANSCEN), United States Army Forces Command, and the Installation Management Command is the right course of action. Who will take the lead?

—Colonel Fabian Mendoza Jr.
Commander, 130th Engineer Brigade

Despite today's high operational tempo and frequent separate engineer battalion deployments, the Army still hasn't fully answered the question concerning conducting an MRE and validating the preparedness of a separate engineer battalion. BCTs receive dirt CTC rotations and engineer brigades get Battle Command Training Program (BCTP) rotations. However, the CTCs are not manned to train separate engineer battalions, so getting a CTC rotation for an engineer battalion remains a hit-or-miss affair. The 130th Engineer Brigade, newly stood up in Hawaii, was faced with the challenge of preparing and validating the 65th Engineer Battalion for an Operation Iraqi Freedom deployment without the benefit of a CTC rotation. This article illustrates how the 130th and the 65th tackled this problem by planning and executing a home-station battalion MRE that consisted

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of individual skill training, convoy live fire, a simulation-driven staff exercise (STAFFEX), and multiechelon training at the company and platoon levels.

Concept Development

Once the brigade confirmed that it could not secure a CTC rotation for the 65th Engineer Battalion, it coordinated with the Joint IED Defeat Organization's (JIEDDO's) JCOE for assistance. The C-IED training experts from the center helped the 65th Engineer Battalion MRE by—

- Developing IED lanes.
- Providing realistic training devices.
- Assisting with C-IED battle staff training.
- Helping develop a realistic and complex intelligence history to challenge the staff in pattern analysis.
- Providing "train the trainer" instruction on United States Army Central Command Southwest Asia C-IED tasks.

JCOE in turn tasked a CMATT from Fort Bragg to assist the brigade. Along with the battalion, the brigade and the CMATT then conducted a series of in-process reviews (IPRs) to refine and develop the structure of the MRE (see Figure 1).

During the initial IPR, the battalion identified its primary training objectives for the MRE—training the staff and teaching basic patrol and route clearance operations. The brigade then identified the training methodology and resources such as land, ammunition, trainers, OCs, vehicles, and training aids to meet the training objectives. Although the Schofield Barracks range complex is small, it has several ideal locations for specific training, which aided in the development of situational training exercise (STX) lanes. Tied to the battalion training objectives, the brigade developed five STX lanes to train the myriad of tasks that the battalion's Soldiers would face in-theater. The lanes included—

- Two route clearance lanes.
- One dismounted patrol lane.
- One mounted patrol lane.
- One entry control lane.

Developing a training plan for the companies and patrols was not enough. The brigade developed a plan to stress and train the battalion staff through a combination of virtual

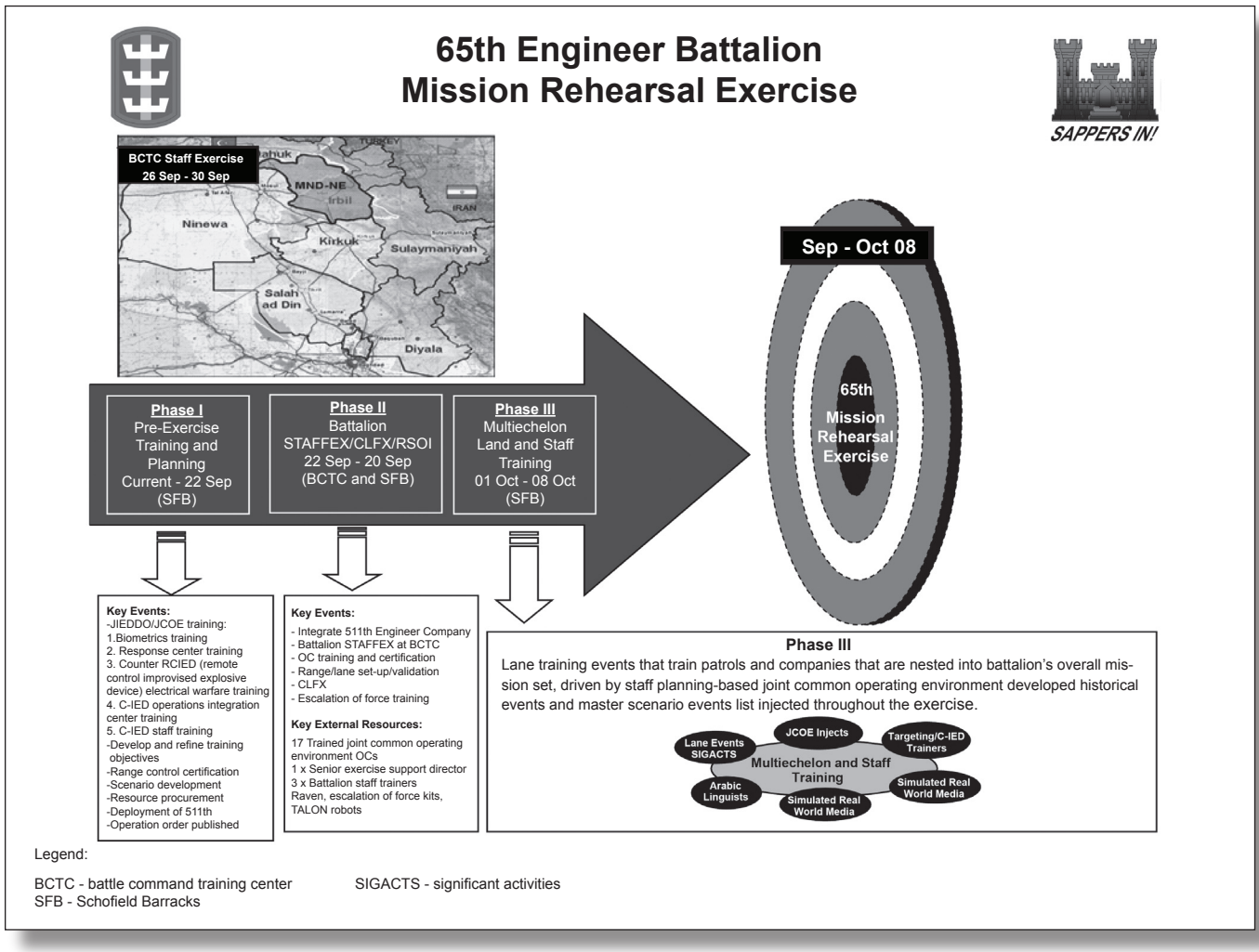

Figure 1

and real-world inputs. The brigade seized the opportunity to use the local Battle Command Training Center (BCTC) for a simulation-driven STAFFEX. To provide a foundation for staff analysis, JCOE trainers worked with brigade and BCTC planners to develop the scenario and range of historically significant activities relevant to the battalion's future area of operations. The brigade also made the STX training multiechelon by overlaying graphics of the terrain the unit would occupy in Iraq with the local terrain, incorporating a prebrief/debrief process, and by having the battalion account for significant activities occurring on the lanes as well as those in the simulation.

Once the major collective events for the MRE were developed, the planners—working with CMATT—cross-walked the individual tasks necessary to support the collective training events and determined what special training skills were needed to execute the collective tasks. They developed an individual training plan that supported the collective training events. Figure 2 lists the individual and special equipment training provided by the JCOE and CMATT.

One of the serious shortcomings in home-station training for Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom is the significant limitation of theater-provided training resources. These limitations can create a drastic difference in training execution versus theater reality. CTCs have this equipment, but other posts often do not. The JCOE provided much of the required equipment and helped contract Arabic linguists for the training. The brigade coordinated with the 25th Infantry Division Aviation Brigade to tie real-world air medical evacuations to the STX lanes.

Training Phases

The output of the initial IPR was a memorandum of understanding between the 130th Engineer Brigade, JCOE, and CMATT that laid out all areas of training and resourcing responsibility. The framework included three phases:

Phase I

Preexercise planning for individual and specialty skill training. This phase prepared the battalion for STX lane execution by training and validating individual skills necessary for subsequent collective training. CMATTs occupied the brigade area of operations and instructed the classes listed in Figure 2. Mobile training teams provided a two-day OC academy focused on C-IED tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP); patrol and route clearance operations; and after-action reviews. The brigade planner used this time to develop the battalion STAFFEX with current and relevant theater-specific data. To do this, the brigade planner, JCOE trainers, and BCTC staff conducted numerous IPRs to collect and analyze data from theater in the 65th Engineer Battalion's future area of operations. Planners pulled data daily from the battalion's future higher headquarters to develop a minimum equipment serviceability list (MESL). MESL formation continued throughout this phase and culminated with an operational overview to the battalion staff to kick off the STAFFEX. This operational overview provided the battalion staff a 90-day historical look into their operation, allowing a smooth occupation of the BCTC.

Joint Center of Excellence/ Counter-IED Mobile Assistance Training Team Topics

- Electronic warfare officer (EWO) training
- Battalion EWO training
- Specialized C-IED working group
- EWO company specialist training
- IED awareness train the trainer
- Command intelligence support team training
- Homemade explosive training
- Crystal software training
- Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) overview
- Biometrics Automated Toolset training
- Route clearance training
- Handheld Interagency Identity Detection Equipment training
- Counter RCIED electronic warfare (CREW)/ CREW operator
- C-IED operations center
- Raven training
- C-IED operations integration center
- C-IED principles
- Soldier as sensor
- Unexploded ordnance (UXO) awareness
- Escalation of force kit and TTP
- React to contact (IED), mounted and dismounted
- IED search
- Entry control point (ECP) procedures

Figure 2

In conjunction with the STAFFEX planning and OC training, the brigade established and trained its white cell to run the convoy live-fire exercise. This training certification was laid out over two days and supervised by a brigade staff officer. The brigade white cell (a nondeploying company used to provide opposing forces and civilians on the battlefield) would eventually transition into the trainers for the 65th Engineer Battalion (-) convoy live-fire exercise (CLFX) execution during Phase II. The white cell's duty was to provide problems the battalion had to solve.

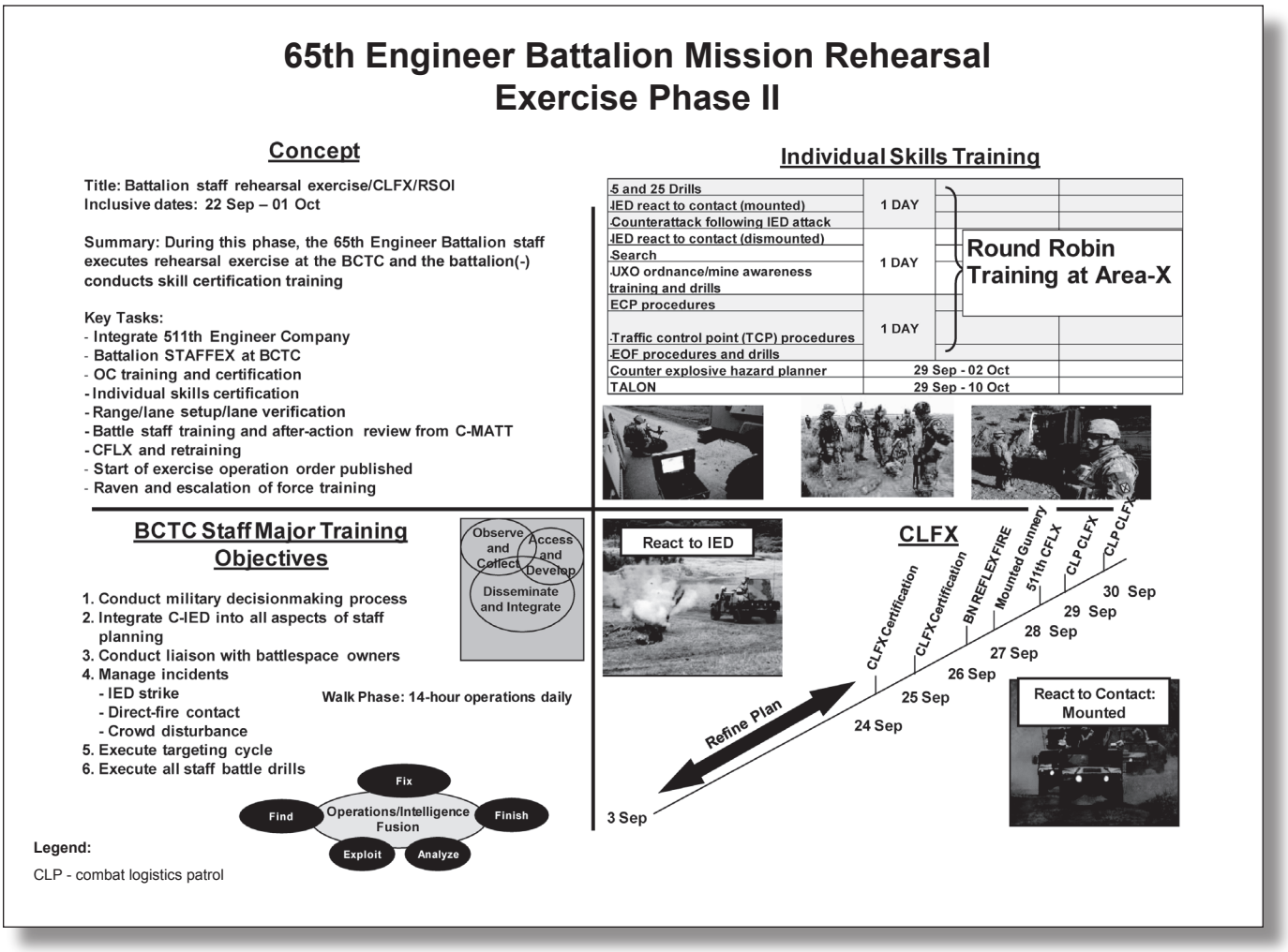

Figure 3

Phase II

Reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (RSOI)/battalion STAFFEX/CLFX. As this phase began, the 65th Engineer Battalion staff occupied the BCTC with the same tactical operations center configuration and Army Battle Command Systems they will use in-theater and began executing their battle rhythm according to their standing operating procedures. The battalion received MESL injects that exercised its tactical operations center battle drills, focusing on identified training objectives. The 130th Engineer Brigade played the role of high command for the exercise, replicating the in-theater higher headquarters brigade and its battle rhythm. The brigade staff MESL development drove the battalion staff working group inputs and outputs. The C-IED working group output would lead to the development of the patrol schedule that drove the link for the training on the ground and the continuation of the STAFFEX into Phase III. The brigade staff provided OCs and was supported by staff trainers from the JCOE. The OC team, led by the brigade executive officer, conducted nightly debriefs to the brigade commander, identifying focus areas and shifting priorities for the MRE.

Also during this phase—and key to the success of the entire training event—was the deployment of a mainland engineer company to Schofield Barracks. The 511th Engineer Company will be a subordinate company to the battalion in-theater. It also received no CTC rotation. By pulling in the 511th, the exercise gave the company and battalion leadership the opportunity to build teams for deployment.

Finally, the white cell used this phase to run convoy live-fire for the battalion, after which the white cell transitioned to setting up the STX lanes with the assistance of the CMATT trainers. Figure 3 lays out the key training objectives within Phase II and the execution of convoy live fire.

Phase III

STX/multiechelon training—virtual and real-world. This phase was a complex operation that combined both live STX training and virtual training within the BCTC, continuing the training battle rhythm started during Phase II. The key to executing this phase successfully was ensuring the synchronization between the BCTC-driven simulation and patrols. To train the staff and incorporate the patrols on the ground, Schofield Barracks terrain was transformed to replicate the battalion's future area of operations. Each lane was depicted as a separate area, with a

maneuver landowner through whom the patrol leader would coordinate movement and report significant activities, which would then flow to the BCTC, where the exercise control cell would transpose them to a grid coordinate on the Multinational Division–North overlay. When done successfully, the battalion staff received five to eight SIGACTS from their live patrols in addition to the simulation-driven ones in adjacent unit areas. These SIGACTS would mesh with the others generated within the simulation, thus providing data for the battalion to exercise its working groups and staff processes.

The five STX lanes allowed training on all the key tasks that patrols might encounter in-theater. The two route clearance lanes exercised basic TTP against the many IED threats the patrols will face. They also trained reaction to vehicle-borne IEDs. The mounted patrol lane allowed units without a route clearance mission to conduct patrols and react to various forms of contact. The dismounted patrol lane trained Soldiers to operate dismounted in an urban environment, negotiate, use interpreters, and react to various forms of contact while dismounted. Finally, the ECP lane trained Soldiers on interaction with local nationals and the fundamentals of escalation of force. All lanes included medical evacuation training. The brigade white cell provided opposing forces and civilians on the battlefield. The successful lane training was the result of combined brigade headquarters and CMATT trainer OC efforts.

Conclusion

The 130th Engineer Brigade sponsored and operated a successful MRE that trained and validated the 65th Engineer Battalion. However, it would not have been possible without getting unconventional training support and sacrificing the brigade staff for two weeks to act as OCs. Understanding the scope of available outside resources is essential to developing a training concept. The JCOE and the CMATT provided resources and training that the battalion otherwise would not have received before deploying and turned a middle-of-the-road training event into a first-class home station MRE. Until the Department of the Army determines a method to allow CTC rotations for all engineer battalions or develops an exportable training package, engineer brigades will be forced to use similar methods to ensure that their Soldiers are prepared for deployment.

Captain Shoemate is the assistant operations and training officer (S-3) for the 130th Engineer Brigade. Previous assignments include S-3 and senior engineer battalion advisor, Support Battalion, 196th Infantry Brigade; Commander, Headquarters, Headquarters Detachment, Asymmetric Warfare Group; group engineer officer and S-3, Asymmetric Warfare Group; and Commander, Headquarters Company, 2d Infantry Division. He holds a bachelor's in social sciences from the University of the Ozarks and graduated from the Engineer Captains Career Course and the Combined Arms and Services Staff School.